



LOVING

by Chad Keith, Production Designer

Loving is the third film I've designed for director Jeff Nichols. We were both in the middle of prepping *Midnight Special* in New Orleans, and were about to take a two-week holiday hiatus. Right before we broke he said, "Check out my latest script over the holidays and let me know what you think." Reading a new script of his was literally a Christmas present because he's such a darn good writer. He didn't tell me anything about it, so I gave it a read and was like "Okay. Wow. We are really going to do a film about interracial marriage, slapped right in the middle of the 1950s and '60s." When we came back from the break, I was excited to tell him my thoughts. "Can we pull it off?" Jeff said. "Totally."



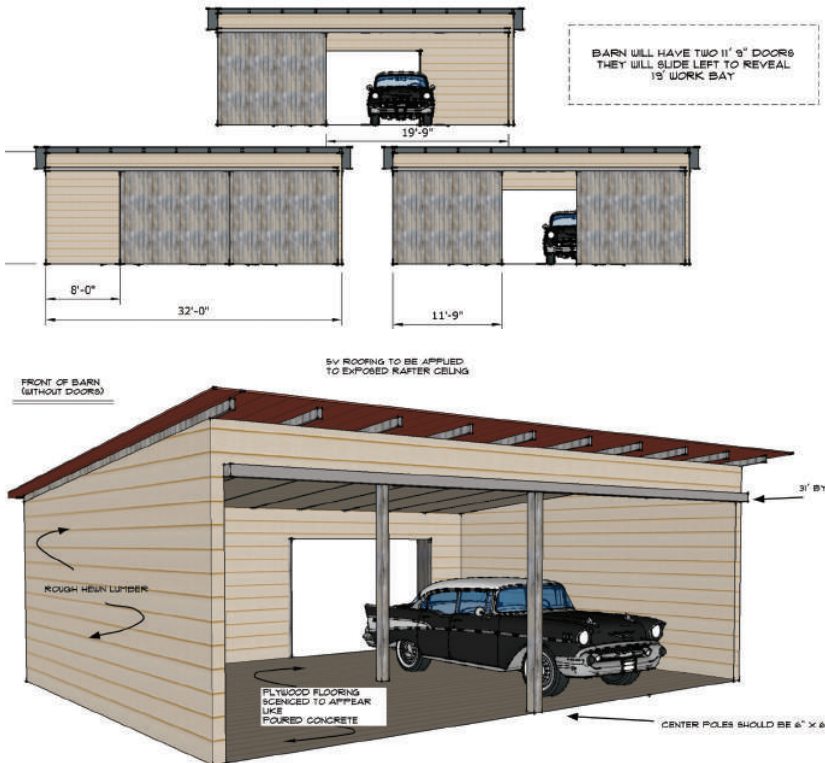
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When I first started research for *Loving*, I didn't know much about the couple. I had heard of the case but couldn't put faces with their name. There was a documentary made about them by Nancy Buirski for HBO that I immediately watched, knowing she was going to be involved with this film. She provided us with hard drives of footage and color photography that she had gathered about Richard and Mildred Loving. It was a great help for us all to be quickly immersed in their world.

Main image: Richard (Joel Edgerton) and Mildred Loving (Ruth Negga) on the porch of the remodeled Berkeley Plantation house that stood in for the King and Queen County home, where the Lovings actually lived. **Above right:** Two photographs of the house, dressed for the 1950s.



On an early scout before we went into prep for the film, Jeff and I and cinematographer Adam Stone hit the ground in Virginia with great excitement, having some knowledge of what to expect after seeing Nancy's documentary. We started out in Bowling Green at the county courthouse, where their first case took place. On the grounds of the courthouse in the town square is the original two-story brick jailhouse where the couple were held during various portions of their fight to be together. Unfortunately, the interior of the jail was in really horrible state and too small for filming, so we could fix up the exterior and make it period-correct, but we would later have to find a different jail interior to match it.



We began to scout for the many locations in the film by going to some of the actual houses the couple had lived in around central Virginia. Being given actual addresses for their former homes and driving toward them was super-exciting and we were happy to see that they were all still standing. When we pulled up to their house in King and Queen County, we sort of scratched our heads for a second about what we were looking at. The front of the house had been renovated to cover up the original front porch that was so memorable in some of the research photos. Bummer. We went inside and the three of us sort of split off and walked around on our own and then met back outside. The interior was a letdown. It was too small for filming. Adam's head was literally touching the ceilings because they were so low, and the entire house had been updated. We drove away and Jeff asked me what it would take for us to shoot there. Basically, we would have to tear the front of the house apart and rip down all the ceilings in the house and start over I told him. It was tempting. But after all that, we would still have been left with a house too small to film in.

This is how most of our scouting went. We were striking out. Too small, too new, too much new development surrounding



Opposite page: Interior and exterior photographs, and SketchUp® drawings by Jonathan Guggenheim, of the detached barn/garage built at Berkeley Plantation south of Richmond, VA. This page, above: The enclosed porch on the back of the King and Queen County house was taken down and rebuilt to match the original one in the research photographs of the Lovings' home. Below: Before-and-after photographs of the kitchen that was stripped out and rebuilt back to the appropriate period.

any house we liked, the wrong style, the wrong this or that. We started to narrow down the pros and cons of our favorites and knew we had to pick multiple houses soon so that we would have time to lock them down and start work.

The hero King and Queen location ended up being a stand-alone farmhouse built in the 1920s about an hour south of Richmond. Adam Stone discovered it one day during his many miles of scouring the whole state. It had been sitting unused for quite a while. The inside of the house was immediately stripped, the kitchen pulled out, the enclosed porch on the back taken down and rebuilt to match the original one in the photos I liked, and lots and lots of painting and wallpapering action. Set decorator Adam Willis was already on the case, locating what would end up being the first of five sets that would all need different appliances and full kitchen setups.

The Washington, DC brownstone was originally in my head as one of the bigger challenges. Richmond is quickly evolving and updating, and streets that would work for row house areas were pretty slim. They exist, but the majority of them have been updated and you'd have to change entire blocks to make it work, which





Above: Two photographs of Richard Loving's mother's farmhouse. It took some convincing to get the family living here to let the production take over their home for a month and allow it to be completely redone from the flooring up. All the walls were covered with plank boards, the floors with plywood sheeting, and then layers of paint were added to age the house back to the correct period. Inset: A photograph of the house before remodeling, as it was found.

Chad Keith, Production Designer
Jonathan Guggenheim, Art Director
Adam Willis, Set Decorator

wasn't friendly to this film's budget. One single block was eventually found that had just begun renovations, and the location managers started knocking on doors to get in to see them. In the middle of the block (which was a perfect position for this exterior), we came across a house that hadn't started any remodeling yet at all. We took out some walls to make it bigger for filming, stripped the floors of layers and layers of linoleum flooring to get down to the original hardwoods, and painted and wallpapered the walls.

I wanted Lola's house (Richard Loving's mother) to feel a bit more run-down in comparison to the other hero homes. It also needed to be in a grouping nearby houses for a specific exterior scene. The grouping of three houses we finally found were literally surrounded by cornfields but by the time prep started there, the fields had been cropped for the year, so it worked out well. It took some convincing to get the family to let us take over their home for a month and to let us completely redo the house from the flooring up. All the walls were covered with plank boards and the floors with plywood sheeting, and then layers of aging with paint were used to bring the house back to the correct period.

Behind the house, a detached barn/garage needed to be constructed. Art Director Jonathan Guggenheim and I, while out scouting, would often pull over on the side of the road and check out existing barns that we liked. We would note certain details about different barns, the doors on that one, the roof on that one, the walls on another. So the new barn was based on elements that were used in the area and how it would function for the scene. Old buildings and barns, sitting around and unused for quite some time, made great weathering reference for how I wanted the sets to look. I took photos and paint chips from these structures for references and discussions with the Scenic team. My father was an auto mechanic who passed away in January last year, and I drove to North Carolina with a van and filled it up with lots of the tools and equipment from his garage to use as set dressing in the barn interior. This set was a throw out to my father, and I'm sure he would have gotten a kick out of seeing his things on the screen.

Another big challenge for the Art Department was a 1950s grocery store scene and a similar hardware store sequence. Not only did the stores have to be period correct but all of the product on the shelves and aisles needed to be also. Adam Willis had some good luck with product for the hardware store from someone that essentially had a store set up like a museum, and we contacted



some companies for permission to use their labels to make a larger quantity of items than we could actually find. The whole department was literally still putting labels on canned food right up until the scene was shot.

A *Life* magazine article from March of 1966 was written about Richard and Mildred Loving in the days leading up to their case going to the Supreme Court. In the article, are photos taken by Grey Villet. Michael Shannon plays Grey Villet in the film, who visits the Lovings (played by Joel Edgerton and Ruth Negga), hangs out with them for a day and photographs them for *Life*. This was the one part of the film where I really wanted to match what their home actually looked like. The magazine article also had to be re-created as a hero prop in the film.



The Lovings were simple people who tried to keep a low profile and had to fight injustice and make sacrifices to stay together. "We have thought about other people," Richard Loving said. "But we are not doing it just because somebody had to do it and we wanted to be the ones. We are doing it for us." I took this into account while making the film. I didn't want the design to stand out in their world; I just wanted it to be simple, a part of them.



The Art Department team was a great part of figuring out this world. Coordinator Susan Sutphin was exceptional, along with Art Department assistant Adam Stynchula, who tried his hardest to get a copy of their real marriage license (but the one you see on the screen is all him). I'm lucky to get to continue working with my friends Jonathan Guggenheim and Adam Willis, and also with Sarah Green, who produces all of Jeff's films. And of course Jeff, who continues to write beautiful scripts for us all to bring to life. **ADG**



Clockwise from top left: Set decorator Adam Willis had some good luck with product for the hardware-store location from a collector who essentially had a store set up like a museum. The grocery store had similar problems locating period product to dress the store shelves; the entire Art Department was literally still putting authentic labels on canned food right up until the scene was shot. Snow was created for the exterior scenes at the Washington, DC row house street, shot in Richmond, VA. In the middle of the block, one row house had not been modernized, so some walls were taken out to make it bigger for filming, layers and layers of linoleum flooring were stripped away to get down to the original hardwood, and the existing walls were painted and wallpapered. The last two images are before-and-after photographs of the interior of Richard's mother's house, showing the addition of planking on the walls, and extensive aging with paint.

